Northern Ireland Economic Trade Statistics
Quick Reference Guide

Background

The NIETS (formerly known as the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES)) is an annual measure of local businesses' sales and purchases of goods and services within Northern Ireland (NI) and to and from markets outside NI. NIETS data is gathered through the NI Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) and has been running since 2011.

Methodology

NIETS data is gathered through the ABI. The ABI sample is drawn from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR).

To maximise survey precision, the Neyman allocation approach to sampling is utilised. The survey universe is stratified by 2 digit SIC code and employee size band, and all businesses with 50+ employees, or 20+ employees and more than one local unit are fully enumerated. The current NIABI sample design includes all Manufacturing businesses with 6 or more employees and those with a turnover of £10 million or larger. Businesses falling below the threshold of complete enumeration are selected on a stratified random basis.

In addition, certain companies of special interest to policymakers and government agencies (for example, certain Invest NI clients) are added to the sample. In all, the ABI samples about 20% of the eligible business population each year.

Revisions

The most recent data published is provisional and are subject to revision in the next reporting period.

Strengths

- Currently the only source of NI-GB trade data
- Captures smaller businesses as businesses sampled must have a VAT turnover above £85K (in 2022/23)
- Trade in both goods and services
- Facilitates profiling trade patterns by business characteristics i.e. industry, business size, geography, etc.

Limitations

- Survey-based data source – associated drawbacks include respondent bias, error, gaps in survey coverage, sampling error etc.

- Survey simply captures the value of a transaction and the destination of the sale. We know nothing about:
  - ➢ the business making the purchase
  - ➢ the products sold
  - ➢ whether the goods are final products or are intermediate goods to be used in a further production process
  - ➢ the ultimate destination of any goods sold on
  - ➢ transport/shipping routes

- Timeliness – there is a delay between collecting the data and publishing the results. Previous year results published annually.

- Sector coverage – Excludes the following sectors:
  - ➢ Insurance and re-insurance industries;
  - ➢ Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Public Administration and Defence;
  - ➢ Local authority and central Government bodies in Education and Human Health and Social Work Activities plus Medical and Dental Practice Activities.

Caveats

Business Counts

Business counts are population-level estimates that are based on the NIETS survey coverage, which does not cover financial and insurance services; the public sector and most of agriculture.

As with any survey estimate, the counts are central estimates with associated confidence intervals. Such estimates can be influenced by survey weighting and the identification of outliers. These estimates should therefore not be treated as an exact administrative count.

The population in this context refers to the business population as measured by the IDBR - a register of all UK businesses registered for VAT or PAYE or both. The NI IDBR estimates that there are about 75,000 such businesses in NI but the eligible NIETS population falls to about 50,000 businesses once the exclusions listed above are applied (public sector; finance and agriculture). There are traders in these sectors that are not captured by NIETS.

Analysis by Local Government District (LGD)

In some instances it is not possible to assign a business to a postcode. This is usually because the head office is outside NI. Such trade is excluded from published tables.

Quick Links

- Current publications and tables
- NISRA Data Portal
- NIETS 2021 crib sheet
- Background Information
- Usage, methods & quality and revisions policy
- User consultation results 2021
- NISRA EU Exit – Trade Analysis